

*William Huyett, Superintendent***2134 Martin Luther King Jr. Way | Berkeley, CA 94704-1180 | 510-644-6348**

Supt. Huyett Letter on Budget Cuts

May 26, 2010

Dear Berkeley Schools Community Members,

For the third straight year I am writing to you about significant cuts to Berkeley Unified, and all California public schools. Over the last two years, we trimmed \$11 million from the budget, and now more reductions are required. For the next school year the Governor's proposed reductions, coupled with our increasing costs force us to reduce the General Fund budget by \$3.1 million.

A couple of years ago, California was 47th in per student funding for education; now, after two years of severe cuts, the state ranks even lower. In many districts, kindergarten through third grade classes, once 20 students, are now 30. Average high school class sizes of 36 to 40 are becoming commonplace. Thanks to Measure A (BSEP), we are not planning to reduce the number of classroom teachers next year or to increase class size. Berkeley grade K-3 classes will remain at an average of 20 students; grades 4-5 at an average of 26, and grades 7-12 at an average of 28.

It is with a real sense of sadness that I watch the continuing economic crisis being compounded by a lack of resolve in Sacramento to prevent the financial collapse of school districts across the state. While in Berkeley there are local resources in the form of Measure A (BSEP) and Measure BB (Facility Maintenance) to help with class size, music, library and other programs, the cuts we will have to make will severely affect the education of our students.

Compounding these difficulties, the Governor has just proposed to eliminate almost all state funding for preschool programs and some afterschool programs, such as the district's BEARS program. (The LEARNS after-school programs are not affected by this reduction.) Currently, BUSD runs a \$5.0 million pre-school program and K-3 afterschool program (BEARS) for low-income families, funded completely by the state and federal governments. The governor's cut would eliminate about \$3.6 million of that funding.

The preschool and BEARS program reductions proposed recently by the Governor come as a shock, and no local support is in place for these programs. This proposal hits our most vulnerable population: children in low-income households. We are collaborating with City of Berkeley and other preschool providers to attempt to mitigate the damage if these reductions become part of the state budget. District preschools, and other area preschools funded by these monies, provide a valuable boost to children as they prepare for kindergarten. Kindergarten readiness is a primary goal of 2020 Vision activities, aimed at eliminating the achievement gap.

I asked my staff in February to make a preliminary list of budget reductions, and this list has been reviewed by the Superintendent's Budget Advisory Committee which made its own recommendations to me. That committee is comprised of an equal number of employees (including all five unions) and community members. I then reviewed all the suggestions before making a recommendation to the School Board. The School Board will make all final decisions and must pass a balanced budget by the end of June. Proposed reductions sent to the Board by me include:

- Over \$1 million in non-salary items, including classroom furniture, textbook money, state school-targeted funds, high school exit exam support monies; and transportation department cuts that will require changes to funding field trip and athletic team transportation
- Elimination of six positions, including a middle school vice principal
- Adult School programs cuts of \$325,000, including fewer classes, higher fees, and higher class

sizes

--Elimination of \$500,000 of operating costs with the opening of our new transportation facility (half of this reduction was built into this year's budget).

I have proposed a one-day furlough of all district staff in order to reduce the number of positions to be laid off. A furlough would need to be negotiated with our unions, and my proposal is for the furlough day to be on a staff development day when no students are attending school.

Three straight years of budget reductions are extremely demoralizing for our hard-working teachers and staff, especially those who are receiving notices of possible layoff. I appreciate the community's support of teachers, staff, and administrators, so I want to continue to keep you informed about these budget reductions. You can sign up for email updates at the website, www.berkeley.net.

Sincerely,

William Huyett
Superintendent of Schools